

Earth to Eats Guide to Naturally Dyeing Eggs the Easy Way

Version 1, April 2011



Eggs dyed from left to right and top to bottom: beet, turmeric, spinach, paprika, coffee, tea, grape juice and blueberries

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Natural and easy egg dyeing? Can you do that? Yep.

My family is very concerned about the environment and we try to do everything we can to make good choices that go lightly on the earth. When Easter time started approaching I made the decision that I wanted to try to introduce my small children to natural egg dyes rather than the boxed kind with bright colors and stickers.

The problem was that most of what I read about natural dyes required hours of preparation, a mordant to get the colors to show and other fancy stuff that a busy mother of three kids just can't be bothered with.

So I set out to find natural egg dyes that we had around the house that could be used all on their own without advance preparation or additional purchases of things. I wanted dyes that were kid-friendly, food-based and came together quickly.

What you will find here is my 2011 selection of dye products and my results. I plan to continue this project throughout the year to find colors we are missing - like red. Hopefully by Easter of 2012 I'll have the whole crayon box to share with you.

If you have any questions at all about the material presented here, please email me at apmom@amusementparkmom.com or leave a comment on the blog at www.earthtoeats.com.

And now on with the show!

Warning

All of the items mentioned in here are dyes. This means they will dye things. I know this should be common sense, but I kind of forgot that at a few points and now have countertop stains and stained dishtowels (and fingers!) as a result.

So if you are working alone, or especially if you are working with children, you need to protect any surfaces you do not want to turn a different color - clothes, hands, tables, etc. None of these dyes washed out when I used them, they were all permanent.

Shopping List

The good thing is nearly everything I used to dye the eggs is something you may have on your pantry shelf or in your freezer already. If it isn't there, you can buy it far in advance and keep it for when you need it. Here are the items that were used:

- Beets: canned, sliced, store brand
- Turmeric: ground, McCormick brand
- Spinach: frozen, chopped, store brand
- Paprika: ground, Dollar Store brand
- Coffee: ground, store brand morning blend
- Tea: Salada black tea bags
- Grape Juice: ready to drink, shelf stable store brand
- Blueberries: frozen, home grown but store brand would be fine
- White vinegar: store brand
- Water

Dyeing Tools

Here are the things I used when dyeing my eggs:

- microwave
- stove
- Pyrex glass measuring cups
- stainless steel measuring spoons
- stainless steel teaspoons for dipping
- drinking glasses for dyeing containers
- non-stick 1 quart saucepan
- cookie cooling rack
- newspaper
- crayons
- egg carton

Caution: You should avoid using anything plastic when dyeing eggs since the plastic will become stained. Opt for glass or non-reactive materials when possible. (Non-reactive materials are stainless steel, enamel coated and most non-stick pans.)

Basic Hard Cooked Egg Recipe

Most people call eggs dyed for Easter "hard boiled" eggs but in truth the last thing you want to do is boil them hard. If you do you end up with an egg with a rubbery white and a greenish tinge around the yolk. Edible, sure, but not very tasty.

To make a great egg, "hard cook" it instead. You have a white that is set and pliable and a yolk that is cooked until smooth and creamy.

Here is how to do it:

Hard Cooked Eggs

Ingredients

Large Eggs

Cold Water

1. Place eggs in sauce pan.
2. Cover with cold water so that water is one inch above level of eggs.
3. Turn burner to high until water comes to a rolling boil.
4. Once water boils, turn off burner and cover pan.
5. Leave pan on the turned off burner for 15 minutes.
6. After 15 minutes put eggs in ice water or hold under running cold water to stop cooking.

This recipe calls for leaving the eggs in the pan for 15 minutes. This has worked for me for 99% of the eggs I've cooked. Every once and awhile I'll get one that isn't quite done. If that worries you then leave them in for 17 or 20 minutes. At 20 minutes you will get some green around the yolk in most eggs, but the white will still be vastly improved over boiled eggs.

Let's Talk about Vinegar

Everywhere I looked I was told to add 1 Tablespoon of white vinegar to the egg dye to set the color. I questioned if this was necessary since a few times in the past I've been without vinegar. I use it for laundry now so I always have it but some folks won't.

You CAN dye eggs without it. I tried some dyes with it and some without and there was a slightly better dye result with vinegar, but not much. So don't feel the vinegar is necessary if you are out of it. It isn't from my trials.

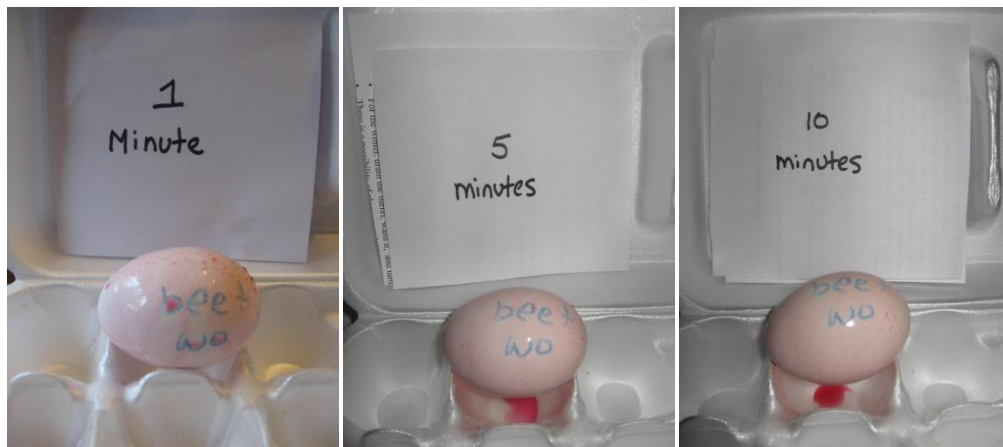
Beets

Beets are one of those things everyone knows stains clothes and countertops. If you've ever made pickled eggs (called red beet eggs in my PA Dutch family) you know that the eggs turn a gorgeous fuchsia color when stored in the beet juice after they soak awhile.

To test the beet juice I did the following:

1. I emptied the beet juice from one can of sliced beets into a saucepan.
2. I heated the juice to boiling for 15 minutes.
3. I placed 1 cup of beet juice and 1 Tablespoon of white vinegar into a glass and added one hard cooked egg. In another glass I just added the beet juice and the egg.
4. I took photos at 1, 5 and 10 minutes intervals of both eggs which you can see below.

Photos of beet juice egg WITH OUT vinegar



Photos of beet juice egg WITH vinegar



Here is a photo of the two eggs next to each other. The one on the left is the one with vinegar; the one on the right is without vinegar. You can see the one with vinegar is slightly darker.



I was very surprised at how pale pink these eggs were compared to what I was used to with my pickled eggs. But pickled eggs are shelled eggs and they also soak for a long time in the juice.

I believe you could probably get a darker egg if you cooked the egg with the beet juice but I did not try that this time. If you attempt this I would add the vinegar to it for best results.

You can keep the juice in the fridge, but you will need to reheat it to dye the eggs. Cold juice does not work. This is the same for all the dyes but if you make them ahead reheat them to a boil before using.

Turmeric

I had heard about dyeing with turmeric before and since I had a small jar of McCormick ground turmeric on my shelf I gave it a go. It said right on the jar it was used for turning things yellow.

I did two experiments with turmeric in different quantities. Here are the instructions for experiment 1:

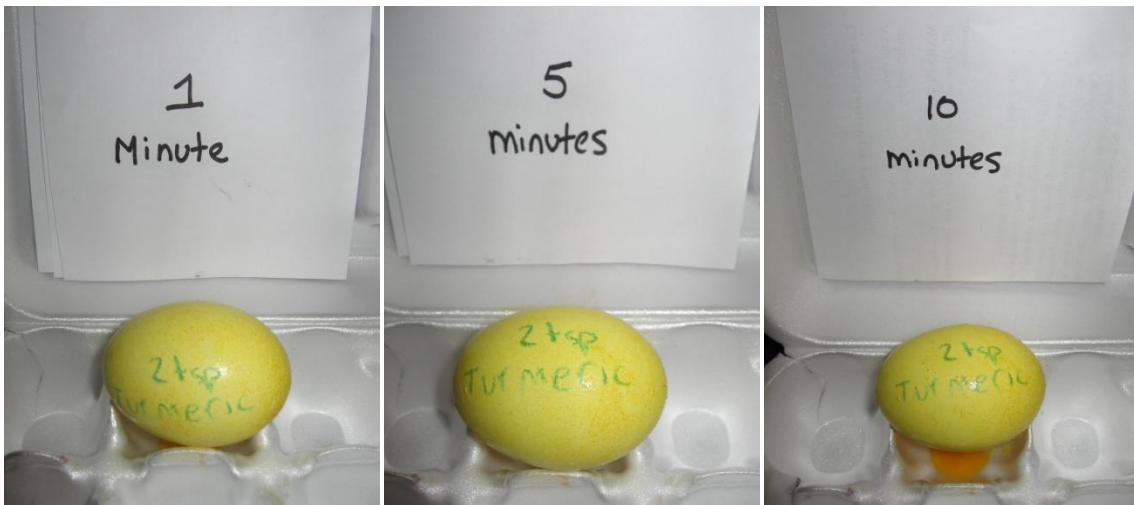
1. I added 1 teaspoon of turmeric to 2 cups of water in a Pyrex glass measuring cup.
2. I microwaved it for 3 minutes until it began to boil.
3. I placed 1 cup of dye and 1 Tablespoon of white vinegar into a glass and added one hard cooked egg. In another glass I just added the dye and the egg.
4. I took photos at 1, 5 and 10 minutes intervals of both eggs which you can see on page 8.

Here are the photos of the eggs. "W/O" means without vinegar:



So not much difference between the two eggs but they did turn out a nice yellow - stronger than the beet juice.

Experiment 2 with turmeric had me use 2 teaspoons of turmeric to one cup of water and 1 Tablespoon of vinegar. The egg colored up more quickly but if you look at the picture on page one you can see the three yellow eggs look much the same in the end.



Spinach

I've heard good things about dyeing eggs with spinach so I wanted to try it with some old frozen spinach I had in the freezer that was ready to be composted. This was store brand chopped spinach, no sauce, no nothing. Just spinach.

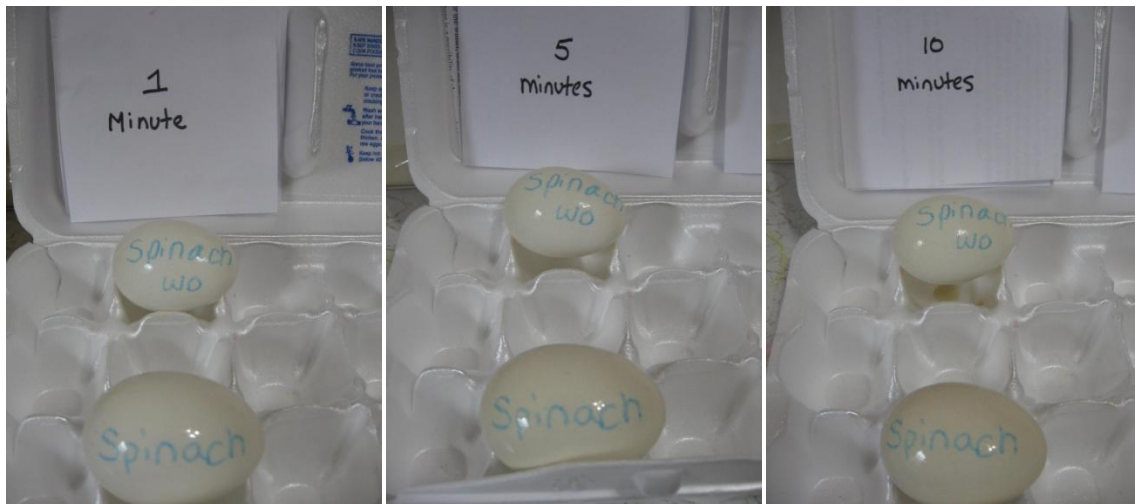
To test the spinach I did the following:

1. I put 1 cup of frozen spinach into a saucepan with 2 cups water.
2. I boiled the spinach in the water for 15 minutes.
3. I strained the spinach through a cloth and squeezed out as much liquid as I could. I composted the solids.
4. I placed 1 cup of spinach liquid and 1 Tablespoon of white vinegar into a glass and added one hard cooked egg. In another glass I just added the spinach liquid and the egg.
5. I took photos at 1, 5 and 10 minutes intervals of both eggs which you can see below.

Glasses of Spinach liquid - glass on the right contains vinegar.
Notice how much difference the vinegar makes in the color of the dye.



Here are the spinach dyed eggs, "wo" means without so the egg on the top is dyed without vinegar in the left hand glass above.



Here are the spinach dyed eggs next to each other. The egg with vinegar is on the bottom (you can read the word spinach on it)



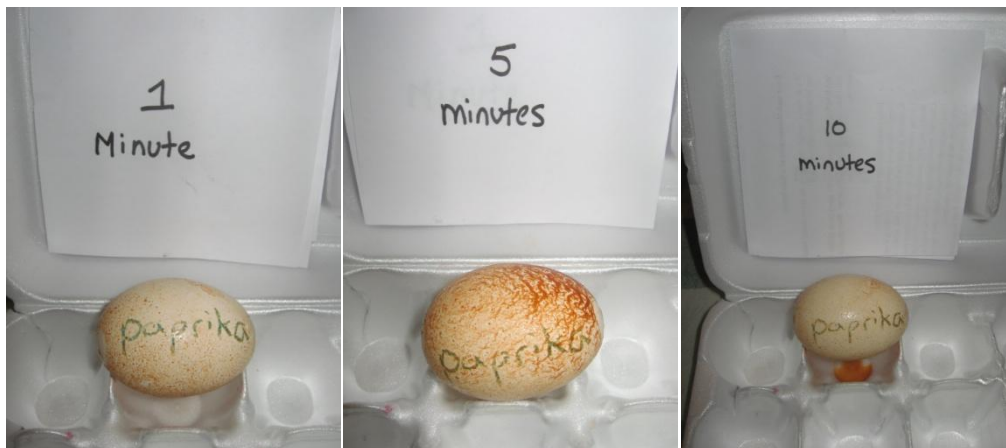
So again, like the beets I was expecting something darker. I think if you added more spinach or less water you would get a more intense dye but I did not try that this time.

Incidentally, the beet and spinach dyed eggs looked beautiful together. Very muted pastels.

Paprika

Well, since my beets didn't turn out very red I thought I'd try paprika which is definitely red in the bottle. My steps for this experiment were:

1. I put $\frac{1}{4}$ cup paprika, 1 cup of water and 1 Tablespoon of white vinegar into a Pyrex glass measuring cup
2. I microwaved it for 3 minutes until it began to boil.
3. I placed 1 cup of dye into a glass and added one hard cooked egg.
4. I took photos at 1, 5 and 10 minutes to see how the color would develop.



I got another yellow egg. This one is more brown-orangeish yellow and is deeper but not as "Eastery" as the turmeric. The paprika also stuck to the egg so it has some texture to it and looks grainy.

Coffee

I got the idea of cooking some eggs in with coffee and tea from a book I picked up at a library sale. I had some concerns about the coffee taste transferring to the eggs while cooking so I put two eggs in with the intention of eating one to see if it tasted of coffee. I did not do a dip dye method with coffee this time, only the boil in method.

Here are the steps I followed for the coffee dyed eggs:

1. I put $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of ground coffee, 2 cups of water and two raw eggs into a saucepan.
2. I followed my instructions for hard cooked eggs and let them sit for 20 minutes (I wanted to make sure they were done.)
3. I composted the coffee grounds.

To my surprise they looked very different. You can see the photo below.



I ended up not eating the second one since I wanted to show the variation in color I got. I found out later that the coffee taste did NOT transfer to the egg. None of the flavors did for eggs cooked IN something.

I really liked the color of these eggs until my daughter said to me, "Why would anyone want to dye an egg brown when you can buy them that color." Hmm....good question. Still turned out pretty and earthy.

Black Tea

I have tea dyed fabric before so knew it made a nice warm brown dye. I did not do a dip dye with tea this time, only the boil in method. Here are the steps I followed using black tea:

1. I put 5 Salada black tea bags, 2½ cups of water and one raw egg into a saucepan.
2. I followed my instructions for hard cooked eggs and let it sit for 20 minutes (I wanted to make sure it was done.)
3. I removed the staples from the tea bags and composted them.

Here are the results of the tea dyed egg:



Again I really liked this color but you CAN buy brown eggs so I guess there is no point in dyeing them.

Grape Juice

OK, why did I throw this one in here? It's easy. Really easy. You heat grape juice up in the microwave until it is hot, add 1 Tablespoon of vinegar per cup of hot juice and you stick the hard cooked egg in. (It also smells really great when it is hot.) Here is what you get:



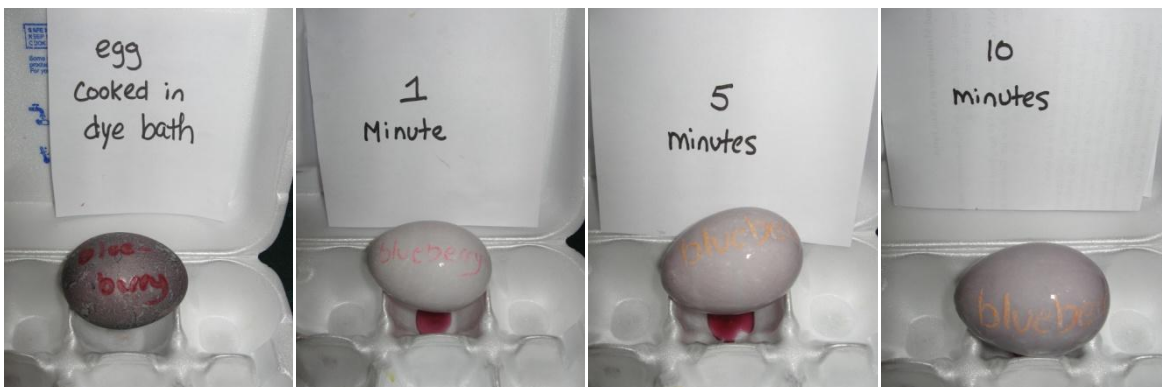
If you read my post on the website you will see that I did not like this color. I thought it was really gray and was better suited to Halloween. Well, that may just be me because my husband said he thought it was a really pretty color. Go figure. It did look much nicer when you put all the eggs together in the box and I guess since it is so easy to do - especially with kids - it is worth a shot.

Note: the grape juice dyed eggs are sticky when they dry

Blueberries

This is one I was anxious to try since I have seen nice blue eggs done with blueberries. I had some frozen ones in the very bottom of the freezer so I gave this a try. I wanted to try a dip dye and also boiling right in the dye. Here is what I did:

1. I put 1 cup frozen blueberries, 1 cup water, 1 uncooked egg and 1 Tablespoon of vinegar in a saucepan.
2. I cooked the egg following my hard cooked instructions.
3. I pulled out the egg to cool and strained the blueberries through a cloth to get as much juice out as I could.
4. I then used this dye and photographed a hard cooked egg at 1, 5 and 10 minutes. See photos below.



The egg cooked in the dye bath is darker and mottled but still is more gray than blue. The egg dipped in the dye is much smoother and closer to blue, but still looks gray to me. It is very nearly the same color as the grape juice eggs.

Results

That wraps up the dye experiments I could do this year. Below is a table showing the results I got and a rating for strength of color for each dye I made plus my notes.

Dye Type	Strength	Notes
Beet	Weak	Easy. Light pink result. Looks good with spinach. Vinegar gives better results.
Turmeric	Strong	Very easy. A bright yellow. Nice Easter color.
Spinach	Weak	Some work. Light green, yellow-green result. Looks good with beets. Vinegar gives better results.
Paprika	Moderate	Very easy. A brownish/orangeish yellow result. Particles left on egg.
Coffee	Strong	Easy. If you want a brown egg this is great.
Black Tea	Strong	Easy. If you want a light brown egg this is great.
Grape Juice	Strong	Very, Very Easy. A hard to describe color, some say blue others say gray. Nice to use with kids. Vinegar gives better results. Eggs dry sticky.
Blueberries	Strong	Some work. Again, maybe gray or maybe blue. Vinegar gives better results.

Quick Egg Dyeing Tips

- Warm dyes and warm eggs work best.
- Use crayons to decorate warm eggs. Colored crayons can be used for colored patterns.
- Flavor of dye does not migrate to egg.
- Cover all surfaces you don't want to change color.
- Use vinegar if you have it for best results. Any kind of vinegar will do.
- Remove eggs to cookie cooling rack with newspaper underneath to dry. The newspaper will catch drips.
- Vegetable oil rubbed onto the eggs will make them shiny - and sticky.
- Be sure to refrigerate dyed eggs as soon as possible after they have dried.

That's all the information I have for you now. As I experiment with new dyes I will update this document to a different version. Please email me at apmom@amusementparkmom.com with suggestions or comments.